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Rehabilitation Review
Vol 5 - No. 10, Oct. 1931.

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REHABILITATION REVIEW

Devoted to the Restoration and Employment of the Disabled

A PROGRAM FOR THE ADJUSTMENT OF PHYSICALLY AND OF MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

WILLIAM J. ELLIS

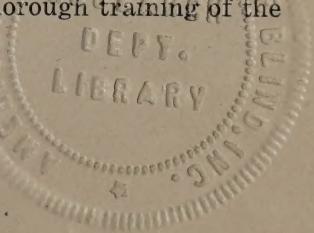
Commissioner, N. J. State Department of Institutions and Agencies, Trenton, New Jersey†

AMONG the handicapped in America today there are large numbers of children who are now or will later become social and economic liabilities unless society's attitude toward the physically and the mentally handicapped becomes wholly constructive.

A majority of the physically and of the mentally handicapped children possess aptitudes and abilities which, when developed by proper social, academic and vocational training can make these children socially and economically competent. To every child we owe the opportunity to develop to the maximum of his capacity. It is our particular duty to see that physically or mentally handicapped children have this opportunity, as a mat-

ter of right and fair play, in order to conserve human resources, and to afford protection against dependency, pauperism, frustration and delinquency.

This country suffers an enormous loss, both economic and social, from adult handicapped persons, who through lack of proper training facilities have become to a degree handicapped and dependent. The potential problem of handicapped children threatens to be still more serious, due to the growing complexity of our daily life and the increasing demand of industry for the capable and alert. The waste of ability which is involved demands that we supply the facilities for thorough training of the handicapped.



The loss and deprivation to the children is alone sufficient cause to warrant our striving in their behalf.

The most immediate objective in dealing with the handicapped children is to identify them to determine the numbers of them in order to know how far their needs are being met and to what extent facilities must be provided to satisfy their demand.

Ten Million Handicapped Children

It is estimated that there are more than ten million children in the United States who are "handicapped" in the sense in which the term is here used i. e. children who are blind and partially seeing, deaf and hard of hearing, crippled, who are mentally deficient or disordered, who are suffering from tuberculosis, parasitic or cardiac diseases.

A recent study to determine the number of typical children requiring special class provisions in the school systems indicates that nearly eight per cent of the school population are mentally or physically handicapped.

The above figures indicate that the problem of the handicapped child is by no means a minor one. It is of sufficient scope and interest to challenge the efforts of all intelligent, thinking persons. Although the movement in behalf of these children is progressing with an acceleration that is encouraging, the results are as yet far from satisfactory. This is due primarily to lack of scientific knowledge of the problem and to lack of adequate facilities for diagnosis, treatment and training.

The Committee on the Physically

and Mentally Handicapped of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection formulated its recommendations for future activities on the following principle:

Like every child, the child who may have some physical or mental handicap is to be regarded as a potential social asset and not a liability. The handicapped child should be so guided that his aptitudes and abilities may be given the fullest possible development and that his life may be one of usefulness, success and happiness.

The question of what we shall do to ameliorate the condition of the handicapped child is complicated, and demands comprehensive research. It involves problems of the physical care of the child, in schools, in institutions and in the home. It involves problems of his education, both general and vocational, and it involves also problems of social training and adjustment.

The specific recommendations for curative and remedial treatment must be decided by the needs of the individual case and must be made in the light of the best scientific knowledge on the subject.

An important phase of a complete program for physically and mentally handicapped children is their education. If doctors and parents and teachers would realize that medical nomenclature must not necessarily be dominated by defects but that educational programs must be based on remaining assets, a new attitude toward handicapped children can be fostered. It is conceivable that the whole group of children can be re-

garded as a series of stimulating challenges of educational methods instead of as a load to be carried with pessimistic fortitude.

In the education of handicapped children there should be a differentiation of methods and procedures to provide the special kind of education required by their special needs.

In view of the relatively longer period of preparation for life's work necessary in the case of handicapped children and because of the somewhat restricted range of employment opportunity to them, a restatement of the aim of education for them may seem advisable. In any such restatement emphasis should be given to the need for vocational training including preparation for professional, commercial and industrial pursuits depending upon the degree and nature of the handicap; and to the adaptation of the curriculum, subject matter and methods necessary to meet the aim.

The successful vocational adjustment of the handicapped child is the practical test of any program formulated for the child. The recommendations of the committees leading towards vocational adjustment are four-fold: Guidance, training, placement and follow-up.

Proper Guidance Essential

The vocational guidance of the physically and mentally handicapped should be directed primarily by the aptitudes and abilities of the child, but never lose sight of the handicaps that are involved. Skillful guidance should lead the child into

those fields in which his handicap will not forbid equal competition with the normal or even into those in which it may be an asset. Such guidance must necessarily be given by well-trained and competent counsellors who will direct the attention of the handicapped child away from what he cannot do to what he can do. Specialize on strength, not on weakness. Give him an opportunity to participate in social activities while he is in school, similar to those in which he will participate when he leaves school.

Vocational training, if related definitely to local industrial, commercial and professional opportunities, is the best guarantee of a specific kind of employment. Such training can often partially be given within the public school system, and through the utilization of special schools. For a large number, however, training on the job will have to be arranged.

The employment of the physically and of the mentally handicapped child of working age would seem to proceed on three levels, viz:

1. Those who are able to work in regular industrial, commercial or professional pursuits alongside of the normal worker and on an economic competitive basis.
 2. Those who are able to work only in a sheltered environment, e.g., a subsidized workshop.
 3. Those who are unable to travel to and from work and therefore must work in their homes, with materials and finished products for them.
- In developing these employment opportunities, industry becomes the focal point for the first level of employability. The program of provid-

ing fair opportunities of useful and profitable employment for the physically or mentally handicapped child of working age is based on the philosophy that any handicapped person who can, despite his handicap, perform a particular job as well as normal persons has a right to employment, and furthermore, if he can compete with the ablebodied, he will secure and hold it.

Industry is often openminded, willing to be convinced of the feasibility of employing the handicapped. If it can be demonstrated to industry that a physically or mentally handicapped young person who has been adequately prepared can perform as well as the normal worker, industry will not be slow in providing employment opportunities.

There are also many tasks in city, State and Federal establishments that could be effectively performed by the physically and the mentally handicapped. A comprehensive survey of these positions should be made with a view of filling these positions as far as is practicable with the physically and the mentally handicapped.

Child's Attitude Toward Handicap

The ultimate social and economic adjustment of the handicapped child depends to a large extent upon the attitude which he has toward his handicap, his associates and the work he is to do. Social contacts are needed in order to enable the child to acquire favorable attitudes. Such contacts will instill self-confidence, good morale and a spirit of independence.

There should be a plan by which

physically or mentally handicapped children may have social contacts with both normal children and other handicapped persons.

Amelioration of the condition of the handicapped child is of great importance. Still more important would be the prevention of the condition. Proper medical care of the individual cases can do much, and improvement in public health work has a considerable value.

Yet much remains to be learned before a large reduction in the total number of cases of physical and mental disabilities can be accomplished.

As a fundamental step in the formulation of any preventive program, research must be carried on in many parts of the field. There is no handicapped group which is so well under control that it does not require research in practically every phase of the problem and especially in the preventive aspect.

It would seem important for the White House Conference to find a way to continue the study on facilities, employment, costs, accomplishments, and results, and the possibilities of prevention.

One of the most vital phases in the efforts to adjust the handicapped in the community is the development of a constructive attitude as to the debt and the opportunity we owe the physically and mentally handicapped children.

If we want civilization to march forward it will march not only on the feet of healthy children, but beside them, shoulder to shoulder, must go those others—those children we have

called "handicapped"—the lame ones, the blind, the deaf, and those sick in body and mind. All these children are ready to be enlisted in this moving army, ready to make their contribution to human progress; to bring what they have of intelligence, of capacity, of spiritual beauty. American civilization cannot spare them.

The handicapped child has a right

1. To as vigorous a body as human skill can give him.
2. To an education so adapted to his handicap that he can be economically independent and have the chance for the fullest life of which he is capable.
3. To be brought up and educated by those who understand the nature of the burden he has to bear and who consider it a privilege to help him bear it.
4. To grow up in a world which does not set him apart, which looks at him, not with scorn or pity or ridicule—but which welcomes him, ex-

actly as it welcomes every child, which offers him identical privileges and identical responsibilities.

5. To a life on which his handicap casts no shadow, but which is full day by day with those things which make it worth while, with comradeship, love, work, play, laughter and tears—a life in which these things bring continually increasing growth, richness, release of energies, joy in achievement.

Address made before the Institute of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, July 3, 1931.

† The program presented herewith is the outgrowth of the work of the Committee on the Physically and Mentally Handicapped of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, William J. Ellis, Chairman. The following sub-committees were concerned with particular phases: The Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Josephine B. Timberlake, Chairman; The Visually Handicapped (blind and partially seeing), Robert B. Irwin, Chairman; The Crippled, Harry H. Howett, Chairman; Internal Conditions, LeRoy Wilkes, Chairman; Problems of Mental Health, Lawson G. Lowrey, Chairman; Problems of Mental Deficiency, E. R. Johnstone, Chairman; and the Vocational Adjustment of Physically and of Mentally Handicapped Children, Emil Frankel, Research Secretary.

WHAT I WOULD DO BASED ON MY EXPERIENCE TO MAKE WORK PLACES SAFE WERE I EMPLOYER OR OWNER

JAMES L. GERON

Director, Division of Inspection, New York State Department of Labor

IF I were an owner or employer with the experience that has been acquired from enforcing safety and sanitary laws, I would know that if my employees were trained in the proper method of creating the products manufactured, it would reduce injuries, and, therefore, be the best asset in my business; and that such a policy would be to the best interests of the business if the employees were properly instructed in the correct and safe methods of performing their various duties.

Believing in the necessity for proper instruction and training of employees to promote safe conditions, naturally I would exercise intelligent effort relative to the arrangement and equipment of the working places in and about the plant in order to provide safety, comfort and real welfare for those employed. At least I would give as much attention and consideration to the selection, training and comfort of the employees as I would to the manufacturing equip-

ment, the purchasing of raw material, and the sale and distribution of the products manufactured.

In the work which we, as enforcing officers, are doing, we gain some varied experiences relative to the different types of manufacturing and mercantile establishments; and while we have the opportunity of seeing and observing all kinds of establishments, varying from good to bad, we know most of them should be financially successful. It makes one marvel that many of them are as successful as they are, when there is every evidence of their failure to conduct their businesses in a manner that would promote the best interests of the employer and employees.

In our efforts to secure proper industrial safeguarding or sanitary conditions, we have all heard the wornout arguments such as "We are not making money," "We cannot afford the cost," and other statements too numerous to mention. Everybody desires that employers make money,

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